

Neal Culver and Kim Cook Oral History
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NEAL CULVER OF UW CLASSIFIED STAFF ASSOCIATION & SEIU 925

KIM COOK OF 9TO5 & SEIU 925

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INTERVIEWER: CONOR CASEY

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[00:00:07] CONOR: This is Conor Casey from the Labor Archives of Washington. It's June 4th, 2024, and I'm here doing an interview as part of the Labor Archives Oral History Project. I wonder if you could, Neal, introduce yourself and say your name and spell out your first and last name?

[00:00:26] NEAL: I'm Neal Culver. First name Neal, N-E-A-L; last name Culver, C-U-L-V-E-R.

[00:00:35] CONOR: [To Kim] And I wonder if you could spell out your first and last name?

[00:00:38] KIM: Kim Cook. K-I-M, C-O-O-K.

[00:00:42] CONOR: And Neal, how old are you and what was your birthday? Where were you born?

[00:00:47] NEAL: I was born in Renton [Washington], June 5th, 1949, so I will be seventy-five years old tomorrow.

[00:00:54] CONOR: Alright, oh, happy birthday! And how about you?

[00:00:59] KIM: I was born March 26, 1956, in Omaha, Nebraska.

[00:01:04] CONOR: Oh okay, cool. And then in terms of what gender, if any, do you identify with, and what are your preferred pronouns?

[00:01:15] NEAL: Okay, I guess I identify as being a male. And I don't know, I've never thought about what my preferred pronouns are and what context you wish that [shrugs] me, you know, that you... [shrugs]

[00:01:45] CONOR: Okay, thanks.

[00:01:47] KIM: "He" probably works, right?

[00:01:48] NEAL: Yeah, "he."

[00:01:49] KIM: "He" works. Okay.

[00:01:51] NEAL: Yeah, okay.

[00:01:52] CONOR: Okay, thank you.

[00:01:55] KIM: And I identify as female. I prefer she/her pronouns.

[00:01:59] CONOR: Thank you. And then this next question is, could you talk about what race or ethnicity you identify as and how important your racial or ethnic background is to you?

[00:02:10] NEAL: I guess I'm of Northern European, mostly British. I have two percent Spanish DNA, which I'm very proud of. [laughs] And I don't think my identification is that strong as an ethnic cultural, you know, thing.

[00:02:50] KIM: I just learned, in fact, that I am primarily Jewish and Polish. This is a new revelation for me. So it obviously doesn't have a lot to do with my—how I think about my ethnicity or my religion, but yeah. I identify as white working class. That's probably how I identify.

[00:03:16] CONOR: And can you talk about what social, political, ethnic, racial, or religious communities you regularly connect with or participate in?

[00:03:24] NEAL: In my case, I've been a Democratic Party worker since 1968. And I don't really have any religious affiliation. I identify with the labor movement.

[00:03:49] KIM: Sounds good. I would say identify with the labor movement, as well. I also participate in the lesbian and gay community. And really no religious affiliation at this point.

[00:04:04] CONOR: And then where do you live right now?

[00:04:08] NEAL: I live in Tacoma.

[00:04:10] CONOR: Oh, cool. Okay.

[00:04:13] KIM: I live in the south side of Seattle.

[00:04:15] CONOR: Okay. And I wonder if you can talk a little bit about your childhood and family and where you were born?

[00:04:23] NEAL: Well, I was born, as I said, in Renton, and I grew up in the Burien area, south of Seattle. My dad worked for Kenworth Motor Truck Company, and he was in the union there for a while, and then he was promoted out of it, but... So I grew up in the suburbs and with a lot of Boeing engineers around. [laughs]

[00:05:02] KIM: [laughs] I bet!

[00:05:04] CONOR: And would your dad have been in the machinists' union?

[00:05:07] NEAL: My dad was in Automotive Machinists Local 289. Oh, okay.

[00:05:13] KIM: Wow.

[00:05:13] NEAL: Which caused a lot of problems. Because they had local 79 and 289 representing workers in the same plant. And their contracts didn't expire at the same time. So the guys from local 79 would be on strike, and the guys from local 289 couldn't cross the picket line, but because they weren't on strike, they didn't get strike benefits. So it wasn't the ideal situation.

[00:05:49] CONOR: Do you remember your dad being involved in union offices?

[00:05:54] NEAL: No, my dad was a very shy, retiring person. And he did not—he was not a joiner by any means. But he did not always agree with the strategies that the leadership of Local 289 employed.

[00:06:22] CONOR: How about you, Kim? Could you talk a little bit about—

[00:06:26] KIM: Yeah, I can say my mother was just the opposite of your father. I remember my mom. I was raised by a single mother in Omaha, Nebraska. She worked at a Western Electric factory. And she would brag that she helped organize her factory. IBEW [International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers] was her union. I can't remember her local number. [points at Neal] His memory is amazing. And she was always involved in the union. I remember spending Christmases at union Christmas parties, and on the picket line with her. And she eventually ran for office and dealt with a lot of sexism, of course. And eventually—and after I became a union organizer, she decided to take a break from the factory and go organize for her union for awhile, too. And she was also very involved in the Democratic Party but never got me there. She tried. She tried.

[00:07:30] CONOR: Neal, can you describe your—well, where did you go to school? And can you describe what that was like?

[00:07:36] NEAL: Well, I grew up, as I said—I went to Highline High School in Burien. And then I went to Highline Community College for two years and transferred to the University of Washington in 1969. My intention—I majored in history—and in the College of Education, my intention was to be a history teacher.

However, the demographics and the local economy worked very much against me when I graduated from school there in 1971. And so I only substitute taught about a half dozen times or something. And that was the extent of my career in that field. And I had to find a way to support myself. So from the standpoint of—you know, that led me off in different directions from what I intended.

[00:08:47] CONOR: And this would have been around the time of what was referred to usually as the Boeing Bust?

[00:08:52] NEAL: Exactly.

[00:08:53] CONOR: Okay. How about you, Kim?

[00:08:58] KIM: What was the question?

[00:08:59] CONOR: Where did you go to school, and can you describe what that was like?

[00:09:03] KIM: Where I went to school? Grew up in, you know, public schools in Millard, Nebraska, outside Omaha. It was a very conservative area. At that point, the kind of discrimination I was experiencing was that I had a single mom who people thought was just horrible, that this woman was raising her children alone. I went off to college in a small private liberal arts college north of Chicago, Lake Forest College. One of my high school teachers pointed me in that direction. He had gone there and I got a full ride because of financial aid. And that was where I really got exposed to the women's movement. It was early, you know, sort of that wave of the women's movement. I was in college right at the right moment. So it was very eye-opening and exciting for me to be in college. And seventy-four to seventy-eight were my years in college, big years for the women's movement.

[00:10:13] CONOR: Okay. And were you also a part of maybe the anti-war movement?

[00:10:17] KIM: No, I was kind of after that. I was just after, right after that. So it was more like early anti-apartheid work was happening around that time.

[00:10:24] CONOR: Oh, yeah. Oh, interesting.

[00:10:26] KIM: That kind of—lots of civil rights and social justice kinds of issues, but primarily women's stuff.

[00:10:35] CONOR: You mentioned the—noted that there are different waves of the women's movement. Did your mom conceive of herself as the previous wave of the women's movement as being such an activist?

[00:10:45] KIM: Probably not at the time. She would have said she wasn't a feminist, but when she looked back on it, absolutely. And I think she would have even admitted it.

[00:10:53] CONOR: Oh, interesting. Okay. Neal, can you describe your early jobs?

[00:11:00] NEAL: Well, I worked for—well, the first jobs, period, that I had were a couple of times I worked in summer jobs at Kenworth. And the last time that I worked there, I worked in the paint department. And one of my coworkers was the Green River Killer. [laughs] And they loved him. They did not like me. And he did not impress me very much as being very smart, but he wanted to be a painter and they thought he was a real go-getter type. And of course, he certainly was, but he had rather unusual hobbies. I also, as a matter of fact, as

an aside, I worked in the [Nelson] Rockefeller campaign in 1968 before I became a Democrat. And when Nixon was nominated, I refused to go along with that. But I liked some of the progressive Republicans. My all-time political hero was George W. Norris from Nebraska, her [Kim's] home state. And so when I worked in the 1968 campaign, one of the fellows that I worked with, not very much, but I met him and everything, and I can still remember shaking hands with him. And that was Ted Bundy.

[00:12:47] CONOR: Wow.

[00:12:48] NEAL: So I knew two of the most famous mass murders. [laughs]

[00:12:57] CONOR: [laughs] How about you, Kim? Could you tell—

[00:13:01] KIM: Talk about jobs? Yeah. Just like high school jobs,, you know, from the time I was fourteen, sort of following my mother into restaurants, and I worked in the cafeteria at the factory where she worked. I detasseled corn, and you name it. I did it all in high school. My first college job, in fact, my first union job, was when I was in college. And there was a Jewel grocery store down the street from my college, and I got a union cashier job. Was my very first job actually quite fascinating how young people react to paying dues and you know, "What do I get out of this?" But it was a good experience for me. And then, of course, I went on, graduated from college. And then my very first, one of my first jobs out of college was a clerical worker, actually. That was sort of how I got connected to 9to5.

[00:13:54] CONOR: With the grocery store job, was that a Retail Clerks Union?

[00:14:00] KIM: Yeah.

[00:14:01] CONOR: Okay. Before the merger, I guess.

[00:14:02] KIM: Before, yeah. It was, in fact, called the Retail Clerks. Yeah.

[00:14:12] CONOR: And then, I think this is—you know, I'm sort of going through some of the sort of standard questions, but I guess what I'm curious about is, how did you first start working at UW [University of Washington]? And also, how did that early organizing happen with the Classified Staff Association? Like, how did that start getting going?

[00:14:32] NEAL: Okay. Well, I had been working in data processing, as we used to call it, before it was IT and any of those various sorts. And I worked for Eddie Bauer over in Redmond. And I saw the opening in the paper at the UW. And I thought that might be a good change. And so I applied, got a job there.

[00:15:07] And after—I went to work there in December 1980. Well, [Ronald] Reagan had just been elected president. And we went through the Reagan recession. Reagan tried to control—they raised the interest rates and everything, and unemployment and everything went up. And, of course, the Washington state budget took a big hit. [John] Spellman was governor at the time. And they were—they did all kinds of things to save money in the short term. And one of the things that they did was that they changed the payroll system. They lagged the payroll. They used to get paid once a month, at the very end of the month. And then they decided they'd paid you twenty-five percent of your pay, or something like that, like two weeks into the next month. In other words, lagging it. And then you didn't get the full until the end of the month again. And eventually—and then they kind of went to a semi, well, you know, monthly pay system. Well, all of a sudden, you know, lower income people, working class people, a lot of them are, they get paid, and then they pay their rent. And they don't have a lot of

padding between the—you know, they don't have much at the end of the month left on their payroll or paycheck after they've paid rent and whatnot.

[00:17:13] CONOR: And the landlord doesn't like it.

[00:17:15] NEAL: So that put a lot of—I had enough money to get by with that. But I had another person living with me at the time and had, you know, responsibilities. And here all of a sudden my income has been through, you know—I could have actually qualified for food stamps. And I thought that was a gross indignity to have a job and have to get food stamps because these knuckleheads can't manage the budget a little bit better. And so I was extremely mad.

[00:18:04] And so now once before, the representatives of CSA had come around to our area and talked to us at lunch or something. And because they were in the union, I didn't really take them that seriously. But once they started, once they organized the union and affiliated with the CSA, you know, in 1995. And cards came around, I could not sign my card fast enough because I was so mad at the way we had been trod upon. And I didn't—my parents may not have been, or my dad was not a labor activist, but I was very conscious of the fact that some of the preceding generations. My grandfather voted for Eugene V. Debs for president all five times.

[00:19:13] CONOR: Oh, wow.

[00:19:16] NEAL: And a couple of his brothers were Wobblies. So I liked the radical labor tradition that we have in Washington state. Many of my family had been participants in some of that. And so I was gung-ho to do something to improve the conditions of state workers and their treatment from the legislature and governor's office. And so that's why I got in there. And I was telling her [Kim] when they organized the first contract or started bargaining the first contract, I wasn't on the initial team, but the guy from our area, then our bargaining unit, didn't want to do it. So he said, "You do it." So I did it the next twenty years. It kept me pretty well-occupied. [laughs]

[00:20:35] CONOR: Could you talk a little bit about that family history? What industry were the Wobbly members of your family affiliated with?

[00:20:44] NEAL: Well, most of them were in Washington state. Traditionally, we got two big industries. And I'm not talking about Boeing or anything like that. We got wood products, and we got being fishermen. And some of them worked at different times in the mills and stuff like that, my great uncles and so on. And my grandfather kind of—he did some fishing and stuff like that, but he also, you know, did what you could. And my grandmother was also kind of an activist. She was a kind of a leader in the local Socialist Party over there in Kitsap County.

[00:21:45] CONOR: Oh, okay.

[00:21:47] NEAL: And she was on the school board, I believe. And she was always trying to push for working class people to have as good an education as they could. My grandmother was born in 1879, and they were not high schools or anything like that around very much. In fact, the University of Washington originally was more of a high school when it started in 1861 than it was a real college. And my grandmother wanted to go to high school, but she had to go to Seattle to do it. She had relatives in Seattle she could have stayed with, and she could have gone to high school. My grandma was a really smart lady. And her mother wouldn't let her, because she had all these kids that she wanted, and she had to take care of them. So she didn't get to go. So Grandmother made it a goal of hers to make sure that kids got as much educational opportunity as they could. And she was actually the state president of the PTA. And she got elected to be the state. And she worked in the educational

system, you know, trying to help things. And one of the people that she knew was Anna Louise Strong. And so you know, I kind of admired her a lot.

[00:23:39] CONOR: Yeah. Was she also an officer or part of the Socialist Party?

[00:23:45] NEAL: Well, over there in Kitsap County she was.

[00:23:47] CONOR: Oh, yeah.

[00:23:49] NEAL: They actually—she had a falling out with them at one point there in the early twenties and ceased. And one of the things that was in their platform was that you had to support all the candidates, You had to vote a straight ticket. That was included in the platform. And the socialists nominated guy over there in—they lived in Olalla. And they nominated a guy who was kind of basically a drunk [laughs] and kind of a beachcomber type to run. And Grandmother refused to vote for him. And she pointed out in no uncertain terms that it was a bad idea to do that. And she kind of wrecked a local Socialist Party after that. [laughs]

[00:24:51] But the Socialist Party was evolving at that—you know, from the 1920's on, they changed from being the working class labor union-oriented workers, to they became more intellectual types, you know, like Norman Thomas. They were going from Debs to Norman Thomas, who was the more academic intellectual type. A lot of these—it's kind of deviating from what we're talking about here, but that schism was prevalent in the Spanish Civil War with the Americans and Canadians that participated in it. And I watched a documentary on KCTS many years ago, where they did interviews with the Canadian volunteers in the Spanish Civil War. The Americans were mostly academics, and they weren't worth a damn on battlefield. [laughs] But the Canadians were mostly just working class guys who were out of a job, and they were used to living in the rough, you know. And they were very valued by the losing side there in the Spanish Civil War, because they were great fighters, they were tough guys.

[00:26:36] And so you have that dichotomy, and it's still prevalent in the party politics today and has been basically throughout my experience in working in politics. More of your blue collar white guys often are Trumpsters today, and they weren't. They were in the thirties and forties, and through the fifties, sixties, they were the core of the Democratic Party, working in conjunction with the intellectual types.

[00:27:23] CONOR: You know, that kind of reminds me of, you know, um— could you walk me through a little bit about the history of the Classified Staff Association and the sense that sometimes when people work in universities and clerical or office positions, they conceive of themselves as like more of a professional position. And they may not think of themselves as candidates for unions. So how did that first start getting going, and how did that shift happen that you noted?

[00:27:52] NEAL: Well originally, the CSA was founded, and I can't remember what that issue was on campus-wide, because it was before my time. But they did something that really pissed a lot of people off. And two of the guys that were in my department there, Terry McLaughlin and Roger Hoffeditz, they were really incensed, and they started the CSA. They were amongst the leaders starting it. And Terry, in particular, he was not a guy who—he didn't see himself as a professional, he just had more of a working class orientation.

[00:28:59] KIM: Isn't it true that a lot of the early CSA people were supervisors? Like it was managers who helped organize CSA?

[00:29:04] NEAL: A lot of them, yes. And when I first started going—came on the policy board, there were a lot of them that were in that situation. And then they promote them into professional jobs. And it was to such an

extent that we thought that they were actually doing that intentionally to denude the organization of its leadership. And yeah.

[00:29:44] KIM: In 1980, when you first got there or joined, or eighty-one, they weren't affiliated with 9to5.

[00:29:52] NEAL: No.

[00:29:53] KIM: But had they asked for bargaining rights before 9to5?

[00:29:57] NEAL: They actually had a contract at one point, but it was nothing. We couldn't—the way the law was written at that time when we started and bargained our first contract, you really couldn't bargain for very much. Mainly what we were trying to do was to get the Higher Education Personnel Board rules in place in the contract so people can have a visual, you know, they can see what their rights were. And the second thing and most important thing that we were seeking was to get a grievance system, with stewards and so on. That was the big thing that we really needed to get going to organize the union, and then hopefully down the road is what actually happened. We hoped to expand our ability to negotiate.

[00:31:04] CONOR: Could you describe the culture of what it was like to work there at that time? You mentioned the issue with the lagging of the paycheck kind of unilaterally. What other issues were organizing issues for you all? And that came from the state, by the way, not... Oh, it wasn't a UW policy decision.

[00:31:19] NEAL: Yeah, not a—because of the state budget.

[00:31:22] CONOR: Oh, yeah.

[00:31:23] NEAL: And it was, um—where I worked, it was probably not very typical, because, you know, a lot of it—like I worked on third shift or did shift work, and you don't really get into the flow of what's going on on the rest of the campus when you're like that. But I think most of the people there really liked the idea. You know, our people liked working for the University of Washington. A lot of our people were like me, that had graduated from the UW and gone back to work there, and many times in clerical positions and stuff like that. Like, you know, my friend and long time associate there, Linda Roberts, she had two degrees from the U, and she had come back and worked there. She never taught or did anything like that with it. And there were a number of people like that. People that had advanced degrees that were working there. And then there are also people that were, you know, had less academic background and were just, you know, doing what they could.

[00:33:06] KIM: Had you heard that—was CSA, like, I had heard the story to this, some big issue—I can't remember it was—where the classified staff just said, "We're tired of this," and they came together and created the Classified Staff Association. Do you think that was like early seventies or even before that, sixties?

[00:33:21] NEAL: I think it must've been in the seventies, but I don't know exactly when. I know that they had a mass meeting in [Hec] Edmundson Pavilion that was packed. And the UW had somebody there. And one of the—some woman who I whose name I do not know because she was long gone by the time I got there, she just went out there and blasted them. [laughs] And [?Jerry Owens?] was there. He was very impressed by that, 'cause he was not a person to deal with knuckleheads and idiots without expressing his opinions thereof. And he thought that UW personnel people and the way they approached them, whatever the issue was, they were pretty inept. And he was very critical, shall we say.

[00:34:37] CONOR: Was there any relationship to the United Workers Union-Independent? There was a strike in the seventies and an attempt to organize custodial workers, and they introduced the idea of comparable worth at that era.

[00:34:49] NEAL: Well, that would have been—I didn't know about those, but the idea of comparable worth, of course, came from the Washington Federation of State Employees lawsuit. It was a discrimination, sex discrimination suit. And they had—made a settlement, and that's where that came from.

[00:35:21] KIM: So that was the eighties.

[00:35:22] NEAL: Yeah.

[00:35:23] KIM: And so you were there in the seventies.

[00:35:27] NEAL: We got some input into that settlement when they were—and its subsequent implementation. And [Christine] Gregoire was working with the attorney general's office, and she negotiated that with other unions and got input from SEIU's lobbyist. And Gregoire was very good. She made sure everybody's viewpoint got put into the implementation of the settlement.

[00:36:12] As part of that settlement, implementing comparable worth, they brought in a system to evaluate and pay jobs on the basis of their skills. And I was our rep to that after a while. And originally, staff did it. And then I came aboard and did it, because we were kind of short handed. And that was a big deal. I mean, they did all the—the Higher Education Personnel Board did a review of all the clerical jobs, the clerical class plan review. And I came in there basically with no experience having done this and had to participate in this committee, that was doing using that system.

[00:37:28] And it was pretty tense because the University of Washington, all the personnel people, were trying to hold down the wages as much as they could, and we were trying to push them up. And the staff of the Higher Education Personnel Board, they tended to fall with the UW staff people. They worked with the staff people on a regular basis. And in our jobs, it was the Federation, Washington Federation [of State Employees], us and the group that was—they weren't a union, but they were an association. They had the prisons and they had some clerical workers in different places. I can't even remember the name of that.

[00:38:38] KIM: Public Employees or something like that, PSE or something.

[00:38:40] NEAL: Yeah. And so when we did these clerical jobs, the person who represented the, you know, the HEP Board on the committee, absolutely did not like me one single bit. And it was so obvious. We had—one of our biggest class vacations were the—um, gosh, I can't think of the, um, not the secretaries.

[00:39:31] KIM: Administrative something? Receptionists?

[00:39:36] NEAL: They were the—God, I'm drawing a blank here.

[00:39:42] CONOR: Coordinators, department coordinators?

[00:39:43] NEAL: Oh yeah, the coordinators, exactly. And that was a big group. And they pushed the—they only gave them like one grade up, two and a half percent or something like that. So we appealed that. And they, of course, resented that. And we had a big fight over that. And we had people down there. We brought a lot of people to the meetings to get that HEP Board to move to reconsider that. And when they—we probably with the

assistance of one person who probably lied about the role of one of the UW staff people, the HEP Board voted to reconsider. And so we did that. And lo and behold, of course the ones that they had the most people in, we still didn't get an increase for them. But we did—the UW rep for the supervisory of that class, they broke ranks, and so those people all got a hefty raise out of it. And so we achieved something of a triumph for it. But that was an organizing issue, a big organizing issue.

[00:41:42] The hostility of the of that Higher Education Personnel Board and the director, they were very biased and not very nice. And I remember one instance where they tried to do some stupid rule change, that they wanted to give more authority to the staff of the HEP Board. And we discussed that in their conference committee. And I said, "Well, if you do this, you have to do that," you know, type of deal. I said, very clearly stated that I was against any change to the way it was done 'cause we didn't trust the individuals in the HEP Board administration.

[00:42:52] So they didn't—their staff didn't communicate with each other, and they thought that they were going to push this thing through no problem. And then we had the meeting and we told them, you know—we spoke against it. And it got rejected. And so I go to the next HEP Board meeting and the director goes out there and starts the meeting off by going after me, not by name, but he says, "Well you guys, you don't communicate. And that's the purpose of these conference committees and so on and so forth." And so I just nailed the guy. It was one of the most satisfying things I have ever done. I pointed out that when we had had the conference committee that discussed this issue, that he hadn't been there, he was sick. And I had told him we were against it and we would never support this. And I said, "Why are you confronting when you choose to do this publicly? If you don't like the way we do something, why not just tap the person on the shoulder before the meeting and quietly have a discussion?" And I said, "Instead you choose to try and harass me." And so I made the guy apologize. He had to apologize publicly. It was very satisfying. But that HEP Board was a bunch of knuckleheads, and we were much better off when we left it.

[00:44:58] CONOR: Can you talk a little bit about—at this point, you mentioned that there's this range within the Classified Staff Association and people that would be represented of like, there were supervisors that were in a leadership role, there were people that were graduates of UW. There was this range of education.

[00:45:16] NEAL: Right.

[00:45:17] CONOR: What were the demographics in terms of like gender or ethnicity?

[00:45:20] NEAL: Oh, when we started, the initial bargaining units were about ninety percent women.

[00:45:26] CONOR: Oh, okay.

[00:45:27] NEAL: And we did a lot of surveys at that time, staff did, to try and get a handle on the demographics of it. And I think that one of the number of— if I remember— it was very striking, the number of single mothers—I mean parents, single parents— that were working there at the UW. They worked there because they wanted, you know—health benefits were extremely important to them, for their kids. And you had to—it was really important to these people because they were living on a very slender margin. There was one woman there that was a single mother. And she used to go to these—she couldn't make it from month to month, she'd run out of money by the end of the month. So she'd go to these paycheck, pay loan things to get by every month. And then we had Wendy [Lyons?], who used to volunteer to be for the medical school people, to use her as a victim, you know?

[00:47:10] KIM: To get money.

[00:47:11] NEAL: Yeah, to make extra money. And you know, a lot of those people were...

[00:47:21] KIM: The demographics in terms of race at that time. I mean, when I got there in eighty-four, I mean, it was pretty white, pretty white city.

[00:47:31] NEAL: Yeah, mostly.

[00:47:32] KIM: There were little pockets of people of color, Filipino and other Asian groups. But I would say that any diversity in the university was probably in, you know, janitor, janitorial jobs, right? Which ended up being AFSCME [American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees], is that right?

[00:47:50] NEAL: Right.

[00:47:51] KIM: AFSCME. Other unions, our unit was predominantly white.

[00:47:56] NEAL: Yep. We were mostly—you know, I would say, characteristically, we'd probably be a kind of a white middle class to lower middle class background. And...yeah.

[00:48:15] CONOR: How did—working in all those different departments could be pretty isolating, right? And kind of disjointed. How did y'all meet other people in different departments to begin organizing and building density? What was the strategy?

[00:48:27] NEAL: Well, you had to just go around and go desk to desk. Once you got your—it helped when you got your steward system set up, because then you had people working within the [motions hands] given area. That's another reason why it was so critical to have a strong steward system, because they're your coworkers out there in the field. And the staff did—the staff had to spend an inordinate amount of time going desk to desk and communicating with people. And it really—my goal, as soon as I got involved—and we saw on the policy board, my overriding goal was to have union shop, or agency shop, because you're running in place so much. You know, you have a fair amount of turnover, in some job classes in particular. So then you got to re-sign them. You got to spend effort to go and recruit new members when they come in there.

[00:49:48] So you're using up staff time that could be used on other projects, you know, like working on politics or, I mean, the link between being a state worker and what happens in Olympia is so critically tied together. And when the Republicans, it's been a long time since they've had a house under their control in the legislature, but we had to work with them, you know, at times because they did have that. And boy, over the—in my lifetime, the level of—the Republican Party in this state has changed so dramatically, because when Governor [Daniel J.] Evans, for instance, was pretty progressive. He was overall a really good governor. He wasn't an anti-government person. He was somebody who wanted to promote education and stuff like that, you know. And then you have this right wing in the Republican party that came in there that, you know, they couldn't—they don't believe in government, and anybody that doesn't own their own business or something is highly suspect. And boy, [inaudible] _____ [?union dropped?].

[00:52:01] KIM: I'm curious back on the organizing question. I mean, by the time CSA decided they needed to affiliate with 9to5, you got staff. So there were a lot of staff going desk to desk back in those days. No email. [laughs] None of that stuff.

[00:52:15] NEAL: No, that's true, too.

[00:52:17] KIM: And, you know, we had to, literally had to go talk to people, write a memo, your memo is like...Everybody was on a little card. Remember, we had little cards with people's names on it? We'd write notes about people we talked to on our little cards. But before you had staff, you all just had to do it on your own?

[00:52:33] NEAL: Well, [shrugs] yeah, they had staff by the time that I got there. They had about three or four people.

[00:52:43] KIM: CSA did? Yeah. And that's when—and I would— because I worked on third shift, I dropped into the union office quite often, especially as I got into the, you know, working with the bargaining team and so on and so forth. And I would run little errands and stuff. You know, one of the first things that I did like that outside was we had some woman who seemed to be under the impression that she was being poisoned by her boss. And she had just gone to work there for a long time and just sat there and did virtually nothing except be fearful that she was being poisoned. And then she quit coming to work at all, and she barricaded herself into her house in West Seattle. She had a little house over there, and I drove over there and delivered a bunch of the paperwork for [her] and left it and... You were a steward?

[00:54:10] NEAL: Yeah. Well, no, I wasn't. I was just trying to be helpful. And this woman had a barricade around her front porch and stuff. And of course, she wouldn't come to the door. So I just had to leave it there. That was my introduction to—

[00:54:27] KIM: We had a lot of people like that in our union.

[00:54:29] NEAL: Grievance. That was my introduction to the grievance and [?grist of any other grievance?]. And, you know, there are people, many people who have legitimate complaints. And most of our stewards were happy to deal with people like that. But the ones that were completely wacko, and there were per se, a good percentage of them. And a lot of our stewards, if they have to deal with people that are the bad employee, the insane employee, that's very disheartening to idealistic people, you know. And that didn't bother me at all. And so I ended up—I would work with the— I would take a lot of the ones that were, you know, because my loyalty to the labor movement would not be shaken because I had to deal with employees who were insane or bad, you know. Didn't bother me a bit.

[00:55:53] KIM: So were you—CSA existed. CSA was already this association. They actually had collective bargaining rights. There were some limited collective bargaining rights. And then as the story goes, at some point Diane Faulkner and Judy Mars, who were members of CSA, decided we weren't strong enough. We're going to call this big national union, 9to5, right? Were you there at the time?

[00:56:17] NEAL: Yeah. I knew—I didn't know them until after it had been done. But I worked with both of them quite extensively.

[00:56:33] KIM: And was the rest of CSA sort of reluctant. Was it really just the two of them renegades saying we need to bring this other—affiliate with this big union?

[00:56:41] NEAL: Well, Patra, they were a group. Patra [?Lee?].

[00:56:44] KIM: Sharon Krachunis.

[00:56:45] NEAL: Sharon Krachunis was wonderful.

[00:56:48] KIM: She was the president.

[00:56:48] NEAL: She was the president of CSA, and then she transitioned and became the president of the chapter there at the UW. And Sharon had the ability to really relate with the women clerical workers. And everybody respected her, and she was a really good leader.

[00:57:17] KIM: And she was supportive of the bringing in 9to5?

[00:57:20] NEAL: Yeah, yeah. She was all for it. And Patra was more [shakes hand] eh. She would have probably given a lot more credit to going with AFSCME.

[00:57:39] KIM: Oh, they were looking at—they were considering AFSCME. I didn't know that.

[00:57:41] NEAL: Yeah. I think that was a natural thing. And I think she regretted, for some reason, she regretted to a certain degree that we hadn't done that, I think.

[00:57:53] KIM: Yeah. But I know for—you know, I knew Judy and Diane later on, and I know that sort of their perspective on it was that 9to5 had just been announced as this women clerical workers.

[00:58:06] NEAL: Right.

[00:58:06] KIM: It was about women. And run by women and for women and blah, blah, blah. And they were very drawn to that, that image, and then wanted that kind of union is what they said to me.

[00:58:18] NEAL: You know, we think of—now, Kim would be more—you know, whose mom worked in the labor movement and so on and came from a working class type background. So she'd be a more—not a surprising person to have in the labor movement.

[00:58:38] KIM: Right.

[00:58:39] NEAL: You would have been, if you would have been back in the 1940s, say, it would have been a logical thing for you. Diane had a master's degree in philosophy from UC [University of California] Berkeley, and she was very idealistic. And she went to India there once and participated in a demonstration with the rag pickers and lived in India for, you know, spent several months there at one point. And you know, this is not the type of people that were around in the, say, like in the 1930's. And most of—and some of our—the educational background of our early staff or the leadership of 9to5 were—well, the gal who did the stuff in Washington there, who became left and became an attorney. She was a Radcliffe graduate. And we had people from Wellesley and Mount Holyoke...

[01:00:07] KIM: Yeah, some of the early leaders.

[01:00:09] NEAL: Seven Sisters and stuff like that. So we had an interesting educational and cultural background there, and the staff were pretty sophisticated.

[01:00:28] CONOR: You mentioned that the party that you kind of bargained with or worked with was the Higher Education Personnel Board. They created two bargaining units at UW, the clerical non-supervisory and the clerical supervisory units. Did you want that? Or I guess what I'm wondering is like, did that decision, was that something that was good because you got both the supervisory and the non-supervisory, or did you find it to be disadvantageous because it divided the unit into different classifications?

[01:00:58] NEAL: Well, in actual practice, I don't think it hindered us, because their interests were pretty much entwined.

[01:01:12] CONOR: Oh, okay.

[01:01:14] KIM: There were technically four bargaining units.

[01:01:16] NEAL: Yeah, there were four bargaining units. And we actually had—at that time, we had KC—we had—which was more of a separate thing, that were there. We had the KCTS, because the University of Washington used to hold a license for Channel 9.

[01:01:33] CONOR: Yeah, oh.

[01:01:35] NEAL: And we also had the—

[01:01:36] KIM: You were in the data processing unit.

[01:01:38] NEAL: And I was in the data processing unit.

[01:01:40] KIM: A different bargaining unit.

[01:01:41] NEAL: And then we had the UW physicians eventually, too.

[01:01:49] KIM: Yeah, that was a different bargaining unit. Yeah.

[01:01:53] NEAL: I always liked the people that they got from KCTS. They were always nice.

[01:02:00] KIM: Mhm. Fun.

[01:02:01] CONOR: It seems kind of unique, because wasn't there a part where you had to give up or change public civil service status?

[01:02:13] KIM: Yeah, yeah yeah. That was when I came in.

[01:02:15] NEAL: Yeah.

[01:02:16] KIM: That was when I came back, right? Yeah.

[01:02:19] NEAL: Yeah. That was quite a job.

[01:02:22] KIM: It was.

[01:02:22] NEAL: First place, it was like to make that change, to leave the civil service and negotiate with the UW, it was like trying to get a camel through the eye of the needle, because there were so many things that had to fall in place. One of the things that was going on was that, you know, Booth Gardner was leaving. So we had to—and Mike Lowry was running for governor. And then they had—we were afraid, very much afraid, he had not been very successful. I mean, he had gotten reasonable amount of votes, but he'd lost the Senate race to Dan Evans. And so we had to make sure he got elected governor first and foremost.

[01:03:25] KIM: So he helped us get this law passed.

[01:03:27] NEAL: Yeah.

[01:03:28] KIM: So I don't know if you mind if I jump in here. Is that okay?

[01:03:31] CONOR: Oh yeah, please. I guess in terms of the timeline, could you talk about when you start to come in?

[01:03:38] KIM: Yeah. So all the early CSA stuff, like when you guys affiliated with SEIU 925, District 925, bargained your first contract, all the things that you [Neal] were involved in, I wasn't there. At the end of that first contract, I was hired my first organizing job to come basically eight hours a day, walk desk to desk, and sign people up. That's all I did.

[01:04:04] NEAL: Yeah. We had—and when, when you were there the first time, we had a open or closed union shop vote.

[01:04:15] KIM: Oh, yeah. Well, that was after I left and you'd lost it.

[01:04:17] NEAL: Yeah.

[01:04:18] KIM: And you lost it.

[01:04:19] NEAL: We lost it.

[01:04:19] KIM: You lost it.

[01:04:20] NEAL: And we knew we were gonna lose it.

[01:04:22] KIM: Right.

[01:04:23] NEAL: And we weren't ready. But the national SEIU pushed us to do it.

[01:04:30] KIM: Was pushing it. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

[01:04:32] NEAL: And then we lost.

[01:04:33] CONOR: Oh, okay.

[01:04:34] KIM: So my years, I was there was like eighty-four, eighty-five. I basically went desk to desk, signed people up to the union. I remember five dollars a month, which were dues, remember that? And then I left and went to Cleveland. And then you guys went through, you know, other contracts. You had your first union shop election. That was the only way you could get union shop. But remember, at this time, as you were saying, you couldn't bargain over money. There was a law that said you could bargain, but God knows what we could bargain over. Do you—what could, what could you bargain over? I mean, there's the great story about tampon machines that we bargained over.

[01:05:13] NEAL: Yeah, we had tampon machines.

[01:05:17] KIM: [laughs] But what else did you bargain over?

[01:05:18] NEAL: Oh, we tried where there was—one of the things that we were trying to do was at that time we're in the transition from the typewriter to word processing PC's, CRT's [cathode ray tubes]. CRT's were a big deal. You know, you had—we were trying to make sure that—

[01:05:54] KIM: So you bargained over all that?

[01:05:56] NEAL: Yeah. We tried to bargain over that. I don't think we ever really got very, really, much out of that.

[01:06:02] KIM: Yeah. I remember people were really afraid of desktop computers, right?

[01:06:06] NEAL: Yeah.

[01:06:06] KIM: People were really afraid of that change.

[01:06:08] NEAL: People would be glued there like...

[01:06:12] KIM: Afraid they were losing their eyesight.

[01:06:14] NEAL: Yeah, exactly.

[01:06:15] CONOR: Oh. So it's a health and safety issue rather than jurisdictional?

[01:06:17] NEAL: It was a health and safety issue.

[01:06:19] CONOR: Oh, I see.

[01:06:20] KIM: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Remember when we thought VDT's [video display terminals] were also impacting pregnant women?

[01:06:25] NEAL: Oh, yeah.

[01:06:26] KIM: And we thought women should be allowed to not have to work in front of a VDT if they were pregnant. It's like, that's the kind of stuff you probably tried to bargain over.

[01:06:34] NEAL: Yup. That's the kind of stuff we tried to bargain.

[01:06:37] KIM: Yeah, yeah. So by the time I came back in ninety-one, you had already—the union was struggling to get members to, you know, to survive. And we said we gotta get collective bargaining. And we gotta get real money on the table so that the union feels like we're doing something.

[01:06:58] NEAL: Right.

[01:06:58] KIM: And we came up with that idea, right?

[01:07:00] NEAL: Yep. And when we'd have—we had a very attractive dues structure when we first came in, it was very nominal. So it was pretty easy to sell that to people. And we got up to around 1500 and some

members, 1550, something like that, before we had the union shop vote. And we'd actually dropped a tiny bit just before that vote. But at any rate, then little dues increases would come in. And every time they did, if we raised the dues, ten percent, we'd probably lose eight percent. You know what I mean? Pam MacEwan, who was the staff director there, she said, it's just almost... [motions hand]

[01:07:51] KIM: Right. It was a constant struggle.

[01:07:54] NEAL: Constant.

[01:07:55] KIM: Yeah, constant struggle. So in ninety-one, we said, we gotta do something different. We gotta get real collective bargaining. We knew we weren't going to win a full collective bargaining law in this state because, frankly, the other unions weren't even interested at the time. And so we talked—we worked out this deal, basically, with the university, where members of our union would leave the HEP Board and civil service laws and go to full collective bargaining as an experiment. And we called it the opt-out law. Remember? We would opt out of civil service, and we would get full collective bargaining over money and union security. We couldn't bargain over health benefits because that was a state benefit, but we could bargain over money. And we passed that law with the support of the university. And it was quite controversial, remember? Like the other unions thought we were...

[01:08:53] NEAL: Yeah, they thought we were traitors.

[01:08:55] KIM: [laughs] Yeah, right.

[01:08:56] NEAL: The Washington Federation of State Employees wanted to be—they saw themselves as being primarily a lobbying organization with the legislature. They wanted to have everything, as much stuff in Olympia as possible. They hated the HEP Board because they had to send somebody to the HEP Board meetings. And we had supported the HEP Board, even though they were a bunch of rotten bastards, because we felt that we had a bigger representation. We'd be a bigger player in the HEP Board than we would be in the state...

[01:09:49] KIM: Civil service.

[01:09:50] NEAL: Civil service.

[01:09:52] KIM: But we got this law passed. Our members were supportive of it. We bargained our first contract. I was there for all of that. And when we got our first contract, we won wage increases, we won—

[01:10:09] NEAL: Bonus.

[01:10:10] KIM: Bonuses, we won lots of changes in the structure of steps, and all kinds of stuff. And we won a merit system, which was also quite controversial at the time. We had merit pay for them. And we won union security. But the deal with the university was we couldn't get this law, this contract in place unless we let everyone vote, members and non-members. So non-members got to vote on whether we were going to now go to no civil service, a union contract with union security, with fair share. Fair share, we called it. And it was a pretty—it was a great campaign. It was a big campaign. It was a tough campaign. We had a lot of opposition from members, people who didn't want to pay dues. And we ended up winning it. And what I remember most about all of that was the vote count.

[01:11:03] NEAL: Right. We had the vote count. And we actually lost. We lost my unit.

[01:11:11] KIM: We lost your unit? Did we? I didn't know that.

[01:11:12] NEAL: Yeah. And we lost the supervisory unit.

[01:11:15] KIM: We lost the little units, but we won the big unit.

[01:11:17] NEAL: We won the big unit. And we were—everybody, we had a big vote count thing, a big party afterwards.

[01:11:27] KIM: We were crying. It was a huge risk, leap of faith for all of us to do that.

[01:11:32] NEAL: Yeah. I called Sharon up.

[01:11:38] KIM: And Sharon was gone by then, yeah.

[01:11:40] NEAL: She was in Australia.

[01:11:42] KIM: Right, right, right.

[01:11:43] NEAL: So I called Australia to tell her the results of the vote.

[01:11:46] KIM: So now we had what we felt was some stability. We had a real contract. We felt like a real union at that point.

[01:11:56] CONOR: How did you build that? How did you build the messaging of that campaign, especially because you probably were trying to sway non-members, as well, to vote in favor?

[01:12:07] KIM: Exactly.

[01:12:07] CONOR: How did you develop that communication strategy?

[01:12:10] KIM: Gosh, I wish I could remember some of the things we said during that. I'm sure that we basically said, "Listen, you're going to get more out of this than you're going to lose. You're going to have the power to make change. And we will win financial—we'll win way more money than you would pay in dues."

[01:12:29] NEAL: Right.

[01:12:30] KIM: And it was true, we did. We won more money than they paid in dues.

[01:12:33] NEAL: And that bonus thing.

[01:12:36] KIM: Yeah. We won a bonus at the next step, that was nice.

[01:12:38] NEAL: That helped with a lot of people.

[01:12:40] KIM: Yeah. We added an additional step that was a bonus, plus the merit system. All of that, yeah. So, you know, even people who weren't like pro-unions just looked at the numbers and could see that they were better off, they were ahead.

[01:12:54] NEAL: A lot of people, before we had that, you would find some people who were fine with what we were trying to do, but at the same time, they'd say, "Hey, I'm getting the same benefits as the people that are paying dues, without paying dues. So, why should I pay dues?"

[01:13:16] KIM: Right. Exactly. They did that all the time.

[01:13:18] NEAL: And that was very frustrating.

[01:13:20] CONOR: It's interesting, because this is really an issue that has come to the fore with the Janus ruling.

[01:13:24] KIM: Absolutely. We're back there.

[01:13:26] CONOR: And when you think about the strategies that you all were doing then are similar to what's happening now?

[01:13:32] KIM: Yeah.

[01:13:32] NEAL: You know, like I said, from the very beginning, when I got on the policy board, my goal was to make everybody pay. And we did all this. And then these miserable jerks on the Supreme Court go and—
[taps table]

[01:13:58] KIM: Yeah, they get rid of it, [?protections?].

[01:13:59] NEAL: Get rid of everything that we worked for all those years. And, you know, when people vote for president, you know, we've gone through—in my experience, you had, I started out there in the sixty-eight presidential election. And all these people didn't want to vote for [Hubert] Humphrey because of the Vietnam War until late, then they started to switch back. But it was too late. And we've gone through all these different stages where they, you know— people think that if the Democratic nominee isn't just to their...it won't hurt anything if the Republicans get in there for four years. We can just act like you can just get that right back, and it won't be a big problem. So they become—you know, they'll sit out the election or whatever. And then these Republicans get in there, and who do they appoint to the Supreme Court? And the Supreme Court is probably appointments are about the most—in my opinion—have the most long-term effect on the direction of government and life in the U.S. than anything else. And even some of the relatively less asinine Republicans like George Bush, Sr., who did he appoint to the Supreme Court? Clarence Thomas, idiot of the first order and a fricking crook to boot.

[01:15:55] KIM: [laughs] Yeah, yeah. Yeah, right, that's right.

[01:15:59] NEAL: And they—God, now, when I was on the board there as retirees president, the president asked me to talk about, you know, the politics and so on. And so I said, "You know, when I first started working in politics and so on, we had—Lyndon Johnson was president. This is a guy who passed Medicare, voting rights bill, Civil Rights Act of 1964. And they were that close [motions with fingers] after the [Barry] Goldwater landslide of having enough votes in Congress to repeal Section 14B of the Taft- Hartley Act, which permits right to work laws, you know.

[01:17:07] KIM: Wow.

[01:17:09] NEAL: They were that close. [motions with fingers] Because they had almost a two-thirds majority. Well, they did.

[01:17:16] KIM: They didn't do it.

[01:17:16] NEAL: And they couldn't quite get it through. And part of that was because some of the liberal, most liberal senators were from farm states where the labor movement wasn't that important, like, and so those guys didn't push very hard for it, or, you know.

[01:17:41] KIM: And now we really are with Janus back to where we were with CSA, with an open shop. The difference is that we—I mean, we knew we had to get real collective bargaining, or we were not going to get people to join. You know, it's just like, it didn't seem like why have a union if you couldn't bargain over things people cared about. So that was the most important thing we had to get. And then you could begin to talk about the power of numbers at the table, right? If you don't join, it weakens us, right?

[01:18:12] CONOR: How did you build that? Oh, I'm sorry.

[01:18:14] KIM: No, that's okay.

[01:18:15] CONOR: How did you build that density, in terms of recruiting more members after you gained collective bargaining? What was your strategy?

[01:18:21] KIM: Well, desk to desk. [laughs] Right? It was all one at a time.

[01:18:26] NEAL: You might as well join because you're paying for it now anyway. So you're paying, what, two dollars more or something, you have a say.

[01:18:36] KIM: I think we convinced people that we could be a powerful union if they joined, and that numbers mattered. Don't you think? I mean, I think we really did. You know, we eventually—you certainly had—you always had the option and under law, the union shop and fair share laws, that people could say, "I don't want to be a member." They'd have to pay their fair share and they could opt out, but those numbers were small. I mean, you could convince people that actually signing up as a member made a difference, that it made the union more powerful, and that we could win more. You know? I think that's right. And then, you know...

[01:19:08] NEAL: No, one thing I think we didn't mention was we were talking about how we recruited people before. So what we would do was if there was some event on campus, the strangler case.

[01:19:26] KIM: Oh, yeah, there were issues.

[01:19:27] CONOR: Oh, yeah.

[01:19:28] KIM: Issues organizing, yeah.

[01:19:28] CONOR: Could you—let's see, that was in ninety-one?

[01:19:33] KIM: It might've been before that. Eighty-nine.

[01:19:35] NEAL: It was a little before that. Eighty-nine, that sounds right.

[01:19:37] KIM: It was before I was back. I wasn't there for the strangler.

[01:19:39] CONOR: Right, eighty-nine.

[01:19:39] KIM: You tell the strangler story.

[01:19:40] CONOR: Yeah, could you—

[01:19:41] NEAL: Yeah, the guy—they had an administrator who grabbed one of the female employees around the neck and starts choking her. Now, if a regular worker did that, he would be out the door, escorted out the door and sent down the street as soon as possible. He would never be allowed back in the workplace. But this guy, because they were afraid, the university was afraid of all will sue, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And so they said, "Well, we'll take care of it later, but for now..." Well, that's too much of a contrast in the way people are treated.

[01:20:35] KIM: Right. You guys were really good at like taking a workplace issue like this, where a worker is mistreated, and turning it into a campaign.

[01:20:44] NEAL: Yeah, that's what we have to do.

[01:20:45] KIM: So you guys called at the strangler.

[01:20:47] NEAL: Right, exactly.

[01:20:48] KIM: And you did actions.

[01:20:49] NEAL: And we had the spy case down there, at the triangle garage.

[01:20:55] CONOR: Oh right, the security camera?

[01:20:56] KIM: People were being spied on. Yeah, right.

[01:20:58] NEAL: And stuff like that.

[01:21:00] KIM: Yeah.

[01:21:00] NEAL: I remember I had to do a radio interview for that, and I just made light of it. I said—I suggested that perhaps they had gotten a surplus U-2 spy plane, were circling over the parking lot to make sure that everybody pay. [laughs]

[01:21:19] KIM: But I think that—that's right. That's exactly right. It's not just about, you know, going just to desk and convincing people that the unit be stronger. It really was issue organizing.

[01:21:28] CONOR: Yeah.

[01:21:28] KIM: And it continues to be, I think. And the union is like, find something people care about and then act like a union, right?

[01:21:34] NEAL: Right.

[01:21:34] KIM: Have a rally or, you know, march on the boss.

[01:21:37] NEAL: One of the things I have always liked was that in the contrast, you look at the contrast between the way Americans perceive being in a labor union and contrast that with the way the British were. There's so much more—the class structure is so strong over there that the British workers, they come in there with the attitude that "I hate these sons of bitches," you know? And they're willing to fight, you know? And our workers, we think we live in this classless society, and so we have to be a little bit more subtle.

[01:22:31] KIM: Yeah. Well, and especially with white collar workers, like at the university, right?

[01:22:34] NEAL: Especially with white collar workers. They identify too much with being, you know, above that.

[01:22:41] KIM: A professional, yeah, right.

[01:22:42] NEAL: And God, it would have been so much easier to have some bunch of people who worked at Yarrow shipyard in Glasgow, or something like that. They'd go out. If they had to deal with a situation like this strangler case, they'd just go out and beat him over the head. [laughs]

[01:23:06] CONOR: Well, that kind of reminds me—you know, from the experience in our campaign, I just noticed that it felt like some of my fellow workers thought because we were so good and clever, we were going to convince the employer with our arguments. And they didn't realize that you have to just do it with power. Right? And so I'm wondering whether—how the shift in consciousness to your fellow workers, you observed? Like, going through these processes or these campaigns, going through these collective bargaining campaigns, how did it shift that generation's idea about themselves? Did you notice it?

[01:23:39] KIM: I don't know if it ever did.

[01:23:40] NEAL: I don't think so.

[01:23:42] KIM: But I would say that you're right, that, you know—especially people who join a bargaining team for the first time. They think, well, we'll just go make all the right arguments. Like if I just present the right information, if I'm just, you know, really persuasive. And, you know, people's lives change by seeing that process and seeing that that's not how the world works.

[01:24:04] NEAL: Yeah, you get some of these people that were so naive. They'd say, "Oh, look, there's three women on that bargaining team across. They're going to—and they're professionals. They've gone through what we're going through. We're rising up to the top." Of course, they weren't aware the reason those people are on the other side there is because they've kissed the management, and they're going to do what benefits them and makes them look good to the people above them, not because of their gender orientation, you know, or yeah. And it took some people a while to figure that out, but after a while, they—when we first bargained, in fact, first contract that we bargained, a lot of the people that we would get on the bargaining team were just thankful. They'd say, "Oh, we think it's so wonderful that we get to sit down at the table with you."

[01:25:17] KIM: [laughs] The employer.

[01:25:20] NEAL: Yeah, with the employer. And they were very deferential. And then by the time we negotiated the next contract, they had Willeen Denton as the negotiator.

[01:25:36] KIM: Remember Willean? Yeah.

[01:25:38] NEAL: And we were having a bargaining session in the building that I worked. And there was all kinds of yelling and carrying on and carrying on. And by that time, everybody was down to more serious business.

[01:26:00] KIM: Eyes wide open.

[01:26:03] NEAL: And there was—yeah. Attitudes changed a lot once people saw what intransigent knuckle heads they were dealing with. And of course, when you bargained with the UW, the people that you were bargaining with really didn't have the full authority to bargain. Yeah, the president of the university... Everything had to be approved by the vice president, you know.

[01:26:31] KIM: We usually had what? The director of personnel and the director of labor relations at the table, and it was—

[01:26:36] NEAL: [Makes sound of disgust]

[01:26:36] KIM: Right.

[01:26:38] NEAL: And yeah. And then they'd have—the people that they would pick to be on the bargaining team that weren't in personnel, that were people—they'd take two or three people from other, you know, from actual working departments that were like directors or something like that. And they were generally speaking people that were considered to be on the rise within the UW. And they were all—oh God, these guys, you'd hear them talk. And the UW owns this Pack Forest. Well every time I pass that when we're going to Mount Rainier, I get slightly nauseous.

[01:27:37] KIM: Why?

[01:27:38] NEAL: Because these knuckleheads on the other side would be saying, "Oh, I had such a terrible day, you know, I had to go up to Pack Forest and retreat there and work on the department budget and blah, blah, blah." Then too, "Oh, I went to Pack Forest there the week before." It's like they're saying it's like—

[01:28:03] KIM: Prison. [laughs]

[01:28:04] NEAL: Well, they're acting like it's the sacrifices that they have to make and stuff like that, and they're going on. Oh, jeez! It was too much to bear.

[01:28:19] CONOR: You mentioned a little bit about how at some points you might have been at odds with other campus unions or statewide unions on some issues, and other times it seems like you were in coalition. What was the kind of array of allies? I mean, it seems like a good draw from the labor movement, the women's movement. What other kind of—at different points, how do people show up in your campaigns? How did you reach out?

[01:28:45] KIM: I don't think we were—back in those days, I don't think we were as good at doing community organizing and community outreach. I mean, we clearly tried to create coalition with the unions on campus. And in terms of state employees, there were probably ten different state employees who represented state employees. I mean, besides WFSE, there was nurses.

[01:29:06] NEAL: Yeah, there were two different nurses unions.

[01:29:09] KIM: Then there was the public employee group that you were trying to think of. Public Employees Federation or something?

[01:29:13] NEAL: Yeah, Washington Public Employees Association.

[01:29:16] KIM: Yeah, I mean, there were a bunch of them. And we tried to create a coalition with all of them, particularly when we had to work with them. And when it came to Olympia, we had to work with them on, you know, health benefits and so on. And eventually, we got our opt-out law. We bargained at least one or two contracts under our opt out law. And they came around and decided that they wanted full collective bargaining. And so collectively, we got full collective bargaining passed, and the state couldn't—we obviously couldn't do that by ourselves. And I think there was one time—I was looking at this timeline—where I felt like we worked the best together ever, where we did—what year was it? We did a rolling strike, and all the different unions had a day where we were striking against the state, because the they were not proposing cost of living raises. And we did a really very fun, effective strike on campus, which freaked out the university, of course, and got lots of press. [to Neal] Were you around for that? Or were you out at bargaining by then?

[01:30:22] NEAL: I think I was out by that time.

[01:30:23] KIM: You might have been out at bargaining by then.

[01:30:24] NEAL: I think I was with—

[01:30:26] KIM: Yeah. It was 2000?

[01:30:27] NEAL: I was on professional staff.

[01:30:30] KIM: Yeah, it might have been the year 2000, something like that. And it was the first—it was the only strike I think we ever took at CSA 9to5. And it was, you know, obviously not everybody went out. But in terms of effectiveness for press, we got a lot of press coverage, and we felt like it was for some we had worked well with all of the other unions in the state. And we won the cost of living raise that we wanted that year as a result of those strikes.

[01:31:05] CONOR: So that's a big deal. I mean, there's different strategies and tools you can use in the labor movement, but the strike is one of the main weapons. It seems like there was a couple of things. One, a question about whether it's quote unquote "legal" to strike. And then also the question about whether it would be effective if you had the density or people that would actually do it.

[01:31:25] KIM: Yeah.

[01:31:25] CONOR: How did you test your numbers to build for [inaudible] _____?

[01:31:27] KIM: Well, and the other thing—I mean, we tried hard, of course, we did a lot of prep. A lot of people came to meetings saying, "It's illegal. Why would we do something illegal?" We talked to everybody. We also decided that—I mean, on a normal strike, you would never go out if you couldn't get the vast majority of people to go out. In this case, because we were really striking against the state and not the university, and we were doing rolling strikes all over the state—so it was an interesting strategy—we decided we could go out with

less than half of people going out that day, and it was one day. And we knew that we could have some impact on the university, but most importantly, we knew we could get press and get people excited about doing something collectively.

[01:32:15] So we, I think—I don't know how many people we took out, but it definitely wasn't the majority of people. But it's also just inspiring for people to decide to take action like that. There were lots of people who were nervous about it, they didn't want to go out, they thought they could get fired, and all those things; then found the courage to come out that day. And I think it made a big difference in our union overall. But I don't think we've ever—we haven't called for a strike. I don't think that union has ever called for a strike. You might know better than I do, because you're a newer member, but I don't think there's been a strike since.

[01:32:52] CONOR: What was the sort of thinking around that interpretation of the law that said it was illegal, and how did that evolve over time?

[01:33:08] KIM: [sighs] I think, you know, we believe that, you know, yeah, somebody could probably interpret it as illegal, but who cares, right?

[01:33:15] NEAL: Yeah, if you've got enough people, it doesn't make any difference.

[01:33:19] KIM: Yeah, what are they gonna do, throw us all in jail? And it was a short-term strike. Like if we had taken a long-term strike, then we would have had to think harder about the implications for those people who were out for the organization, and so on. But a one-day strike, we figured we're going to get away with that. We're not worried about the legalities of it.

[01:33:38] CONOR: How much of a lead time did you have to plan the actions?

[01:33:41] KIM: Oh, months, months, months.

[01:33:41] CONOR: Oh, okay. So do you did a lot of leg work?

[01:33:44] KIM: Yeah, because I think we early on thought—I mean, I would say at least two months of lead time, and that's not a lot of time to plan for a strike, right? But I think we knew all along that we wanted to pull off something like that collectively.

[01:34:00] CONOR: There's this really interesting dynamic that you're all describing here that keeps popping up, which is that as a public employees union, at times you're bargaining with the UW as an employer, but at different points, you're really having to advocate for legislation and that kind of stuff, because really the legislature is the one that's creating economic issues.

[01:34:22] KIM: Yeah.

[01:34:22] CONOR: Can you talk about the interplay between those strategies?

[01:34:25] KIM: Well, I mean, even if you've got the university to agree to a contract with big money—the university had to go get the legislature to fund it.

[01:34:33] NEAL: Right, still got to get it funded.

[01:34:34] KIM: And not all of it, but most of it. So we, as I think you said this, Neal—the relationship between our political activity and our union activity on campus or bargaining contracts were always so intimately connected, right? We always had to—we were always electing people who, you know, who cared about us, who believed in unions, who believed in higher education. And so both of those things were probably the priorities of the union, was electing good people into the state legislature. Very focused on the state legislature, not so much on local politics or national politics in our local.

[01:35:17] NEAL: You know, that was one of the first thing, you know, when going back there to the early eighties, like I said, you know, when Spellman and those guys run roughshod over us there, I knew you needed to have a lobbyist, you needed to have power in Olympia.

[01:35:39] KIM: Yeah, lobbyists, yeah. You always had lobbyists.

[01:35:40] NEAL: If you're public employee. That's—you don't see very many, who have their—you know, are very smart that are going out there and wanting to elect MAGA Republicans or something.

[01:36:01] KIM: If they get it, if they get it, if they get it.

[01:36:03] NEAL: Yeah, if they get it. A lot of them don't.

[01:36:05] KIM: Sometimes we would elect people who felt close to us, and then we would ask for their assistance in bargaining at the table, right? We would ask for them to make a phone call, or ask them to come to the table, or come to our rallies, right?

[01:36:19] NEAL: Even in District 925, we had a little unit in New York with an insurance company, I think, was some insurance kind of thing.

[01:36:32] KIM: Equitable.

[01:36:33] NEAL: Yeah, equitable. And Daniel Patrick Moynihan was senator at the time, and he interceded for us for a little bit.

[01:36:44] KIM: Right, right.

[01:36:44] NEAL: And then the insurance company just moved the whole thing out of the state.

[01:36:50] KIM: Right, right. I mean, it's an interesting relationship, right? Because the university relies on the state legislature for money. So state legislators are being told the university is not treating their employees right or they're messing with us, they would get worried about their, you know, image to the state legislature. So those things, you know, it's a good dynamic for us to strategically play with. Right.

[01:37:15] NEAL: It's always been a little disturbing to me that the legislature doesn't exercise a little more control over the activities of the university.

[01:37:31] KIM: Yeah, that's true.

[01:37:32] NEAL: And I've always thought they needed to do that more. But if you think about it, the way our legislature's constructed there, you know, we have a short session. They're part-timers. I've always favored a

full-time legislature that could actually look into things and keep an eye on these guys. I think they run amok up there in the front office there.

[01:38:09] CONOR: Did you notice any shifts in the organizational culture of UW as a whole as the different sectors of the workers started to organize? I mean, did it change any of that sort of hierarchy or the tone of the culture?

[01:38:26] NEAL: I don't think so, really. One thing—

[01:38:32] KIM: They knew they had to deal with us eventually.

[01:38:34] NEAL: You know, one thing that has happened at the university, which is quite striking, is the priorities of the university itself have some impact. Like, the business school is a monster. And you know, they pump all this money into that type of stuff. And then academia, like from the Smith Hall branch of the, you know—they've been, you know, underfunded for years. We've had people that had to—you know, they cut the support staff there. And then you'd have—I can't even remember the guy's name, but he used to work, and he did Russian studies or something, and he ended up having to go work part-time there and part-time in another place because the funding had been cut.

[01:39:47] The way higher education in this country now is run, it's so oriented toward business. And the idea that people should have some exposure to the arts or history or political science and economics and stuff like that, well, we don't have any time for that. So we have an electorate now that hasn't a clue about the institutions of government and the way it's intended to work, you know.

[01:40:27] CONOR: How do you feel like this campaign and this history came to evolve to incorporate this other movement or this overlapping or synthesis of the 9to5 kind of national movement? I know that there's a difference between 9to5 as an organization, 925 as a union, but then it's also part of this great wave of organizing. How did it—how did those things come together? How did they influence each other?

[01:40:58] KIM: Well, the association 9to5 came first, right? It was a women's organization for the 1970's in Boston. It was sort of—you know, I say the women's movement. People were organizing. Karen Nussbaum and Ellen Cassedy were at Harvard and said, you know, we need to organize women office workers in this wave of feminism, women rising up. And so when they created the association, they tell the story of doing, you know, lots of organizing, the kind of issue organizing, pressure organizing that we talked about, that 9to5 is actually pretty famous for and that you guys did well at UW. Then, you know, just essentially decided, listen, this is the CSA story. We'll have more power as a union with the laws of collective bargaining on our side, right? And the power of the labor movement on our side. And that's why they decided to affiliate with the Service Employees International Union, and I think began in a big way to instill feminism and women's power into labor movement. But really, you know, at the time I came into the labor movement, it was pretty male, pretty white male, right? All the leadership of even SEIU.

[01:42:24] And so when 9to5 came to campus and CSA affiliated with 9to5, it was just a good marriage of the labor movement and the women's movement at the time, right? And began to create, I believe strongly, a different kind of union than I had seen otherwise. Certainly always run by women, right? Always women at the top of our organization, continues to be today. And predominantly women, although thank God, we had lots of great leaders like this one [points to Neal], who—

[01:43:08] NEAL: I was an anomaly.

[01:43:10] KIM: [laughs] Yeah, you were. It's true. We didn't have as many like really great men in our union, as Neal is.

[01:43:23] NEAL: I did a—you know, was chosen to be vice president.

[01:43:34] KIM: Of CSA?

[01:43:34] NEAL: Of CSA, 9to5. And the person that was the president ran amok.

[01:43:49] KIM: Who was it?

[01:43:51] NEAL: [?Teresa Selgado?].

[01:43:52] KIM: That's right. That's right. Yeah.

[01:43:56] NEAL: She started doing weird stuff, packing, threatening to commit suicide.

[01:44:04] KIM: She carried a gun.

[01:48:23] [AUDIO ISSUE]

[01:51:45] CONOR: Talk a little bit about what it meant to have more dedicated staff and transition from being an episodic campaign thing to more of an ongoing centralized organization that was going to be around for a while?

[01:52:02] NEAL: Well, it certainly enabled us to redirect some of our resources to other things. We started to look at the childcare.

[01:52:20] CONOR: Oh, right.

[01:52:20] NEAL: And stuff like that. We had some staff that we could start to deploy in other areas.

[01:52:27] CONOR: Is this in 1997, around?

[01:52:30] NEAL: Yeah, right around that period of time.

[01:52:32] CONOR: Yes. And it's—you partnered with Worthy Wage Campaign to organize childcare centers?

[01:52:40] NEAL: Yeah. Now, she [points to Kim's chair] knows a lot more about that than I did. You know, I was in a bit of it, but—and we started to look—I remember we did an action there at Seattle U, we tried to find some contacts there and some of the other colleges and stuff. Plus, I was telling them that one of the things when we won the... we had more financial stability. It enabled us to deploy staff to do stuff like start the childcare initiative and stuff like that.

[01:53:27] KIM: Right.

[01:53:27] CONOR: I wonder whether—it seems like that would be a really fruitful topic for a discussion in an interview, too. Do you think this would be a natural pause to try to talk about that campaign, too, and a future interview?

[01:53:40] KIM: Yeah.

[01:53:40] CONOR: Is that possible? Okay.

[01:53:41] KIM: Yeah. It was a very different stage in the life of 925 between the time when we were primarily UW focused for a very long time.

[01:53:51] CONOR: Oh, yeah.

[01:53:53] KIM: And then the merger happened and we became more of a western Washington, merged local with school employees and some other public employees. That was a phase of the life of a 925 here. And then we organized childcare, which is a whole 'nother chapter in our history. So yeah, that makes sense.

[01:54:14] CONOR: Okay, thanks. Well, so in terms of this portion that we've talked about, is there anything that I haven't asked or anything that you think were significant issues or questions that we should think about, talk about?

[01:54:27] KIM: How are we doing? Did we miss anything? We talked about comp worth, and there's just so many great issue organizing stories from the early days of CSA, and I'm glad that you both remember to bring those up as the kinds of things that— to be a union that couldn't bargain over money, you had to bring up—you had to really have to go after issues that people cared about. And you all were masters at making hey, some of those issues, really organizing around those issues.

[01:55:02] NEAL: Yeah. And we—you know, we'd organize over healthcare. And one of the things we did for healthcare, we got all these people to not cut our—to get the legislature to not cut our healthcare benefits. We got all these thousands of cards from the employees.

[01:55:23] KIM: Right, right.

[01:55:24] NEAL: And then we did a—we were going to do a run and ride to Olympia. And that was when Pam was...

[01:55:36] KIM: Yeah, yeah. Right.

[01:55:38] NEAL: And so we started at Red Square, and I had a backpack on. And I did not carry all of the cards, but I had a represented sampling. And I ran from the UW campus, from Red Square, down to about the end of Boeing Field.

[01:56:06] CONOR: Woah.

[01:56:07] NEAL: And I had to kind of detour around downtown to run down Alaskan Way, so I had added extras. So I figured I ran probably thirteen miles or something with a backpack.

[01:56:19] KIM: Carrying those. So then what happened is somebody stopped, picked up the cards from you, and took them.

[01:56:22] NEAL: And then somebody—yeah, exactly. We did that.

[01:56:25] KIM: Okay.

[01:56:25] NEAL: And we had, like KIRO news came and photographed us leaving. And so I turned on the TV after I did this, because it nearly killed me. You know, it was in the winter time, so I wasn't in shape to go run essentially a half marathon. And the news—we didn't make it on the news because Kevin Coe, the South Hill Rapist, had been released from the jail.

[01:57:01] KIM: That was the news of the day?

[01:57:01] NEAL: And there was nothing on the local news, except that. After, I had not been an advocate of the death penalty, but after that Coe fellow got out like that, my opinion of the death penalty for him went up considerably, because I was not happy about that.

[01:57:30] CONOR: [laughs] Well, just one—I guess one last question then to sort of wrap it up. Like when you think back on it, both your experiences specifically in this campaign, that union, this union, and also just the labor movement in general, what does it all mean to you? Like what are some of the big things you took away from it?

[01:57:53] NEAL: Well, especially, I think in terms of society we live in, where workers don't have the solidarity as workers that they used to have in, say, the first half of the twentieth century. And, you know, I took away that you can still empower people to—you know, I think we accomplished things, that we improved the lives of the people that we represented that are at the university. We were talking about all those women who were trying to raise kids on their salaries, and we got significant pay increases for those people and maintain their health benefits and stuff. And we made a difference in their lives. And that's a big deal.

[01:59:10] KIM: Yeah. And the other thing that unions do—and when we organized [in the] eighties and nineties were a tough time for unions in this country, in terms of decline and the fight back and the anti-union stuff. But, you know, we not only organized and won things for individual people with contracts. You know, we also kept—individual women learned skills and learned leadership and self-confidence. I mean, that was a huge part of why I did this work, is that I wanted, you know, more and more women to be leaders and to stand up for themselves. And, you know, unions are still just such a critical part of democracy in this country, democracy in the workplace and Democracy—a big D—of Democracy across this country that, you know, thank God for unions, right?

[02:00:02] NEAL: Yeah. And movements in general to, you know—we subscribed a couple of these British TV things, you know. And one of them did this thing about a group of women in some little town in England that were suffragettes. And this particular group was not one of the effective ones. And it was a comedy. And they used as the song, or the theme song for the thing, the song "Nana Was a Suffragette," and it talks about how she, the woman, spent the night in jail as a suffragette and got up in front of a mill, you know, where all these women workers are there, and the little gal stands up and makes a fiery speech for the union. It's a continuing struggle. And I think that's very inspiring. We got, you know, working for social change and a betterment of people's lives and empowering them to realize that they can do something.

[02:01:31] KIM: Yeah, absolutely.

[02:01:32] NEAL: It's a very worthwhile thing to do. And that's what the labor union's about. And the tactics and things change. But, well, it might be more satisfying sometimes to go back to the—like one of our staff members, Joan Weiss, and I used to do this little—we did it a couple of times. We talked about—she's from Michigan, and she talked about the sit down strike at GM [General Motors]. And I did the West Coast maritime

strike in 1934. And when the longshoremen were striking down there at the port here in Seattle, the police came to break them up. Except the longshoreman took the policemen's billy cubs away from them and beat them over the head with them. And you know, this would not be publicly acceptable in the modern world, but there was certainly a satisfying element. [laughs]

[02:03:00] KIM: So anyway, that's—we're here. We played a role in—

[02:03:05] NEAL: Right. We played a role in that movement, broad movement.

[02:03:10] CONOR: Yeah.

[02:03:10] KIM: Right, right.

[02:03:12] CONOR: Well, thank you very much, both of you, for your time. And this will be a welcome addition to the different voices in the Labor Archives. Thanks a lot.

[02:03:22] KIM: Great, thanks.